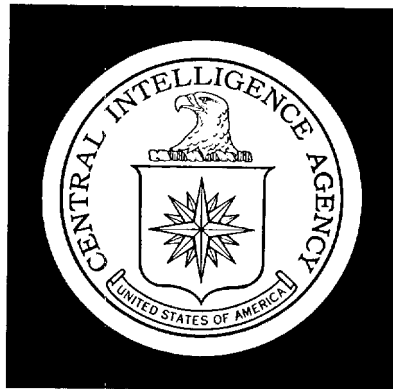
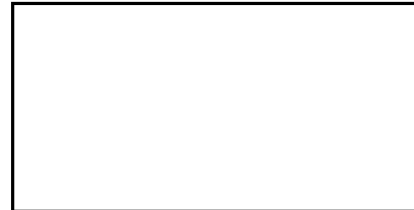


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MEMORANDUM

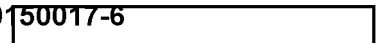
Developments in Indochina

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DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA

(Information as of 1500)

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

In the initial phase of a new dry-season campaign against Communist units based in Cambodia, South Vietnamese forces are moving virtually unopposed along Route 7.

CAMBODIA

There have been no significant new developments in the military situation around Phnom Penh. France has decided to reduce its official representation in Cambodia.

SOUTH VIETNAM

General Minh, the commander of MR-3, has expressed considerable concern over his potential difficulties in defending the region while undertaking operations in Cambodia. It is clear from reports on enemy planning that the Communists hope to exploit the situation. The government is strengthening its position in the Lower House and now appears to have a majority of the deputies firmly in its camp.

LAOS

Government forces attempting to disrupt enemy supply and transportation routes north of the Bolovens Plateau encountered no significant enemy resistance on 21 November.

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REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

South Vietnamese forces are moving virtually unopposed along Route 7 in eastern Kompong Cham Province in the initial phase of a new dry-season campaign against Communist main-force units.

Advance elements of South Vietnamese airborne and armor forces, along with troops from the 18th and 25th divisions, plan to secure the road as far as the village of Khna, where the South Vietnamese intend to establish a major logistics and staging base to support operations into the Chup and Peam Cheang plantations. At the same time, troops from a third division--the 5th--are to mount diversionary attacks northeast along Route 7 toward Mimot.

The South Vietnamese are responding to a two-week-old Cambodian request prompted by the Communist offensive around Phnom Penh and in the Route 6 area. It seems doubtful, however, that the South Vietnamese movement into eastern Kompong Cham Province will do much to relieve the pressure around the capital inasmuch as Communist units there did not come from the areas where the South Vietnamese will probably be operating. It is possible, however, that the South Vietnamese drive will force the Communists to pull their 9th Division regiments away from operations against Cambodian troops in the Chenla II area and to redeploy them eastward. South Vietnamese operations in this area in February and May consisted for the most part of brief, armor-led forays along the main roads and plantation trails. Little effort was made to get off the roadways and into major supply and troop refitting complexes, such as the Dambe area north of Route 7.

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Lon Nol's morale has already improved. He obviously believes that the South Vietnamese campaign will relieve enemy pressure and is worth the political risk of rekindling the kind of animosity against the Vietnamese generated by their misconduct in Cambodia. The Cambodians evidently intend to keep an eye on the current South Vietnamese drive. According to the US ambassador in Phnom Penh, a liaison staff has been set up to work in the South Vietnamese field headquarters in Tay Ninh and army officers are to travel with South Vietnamese units during the operation. Several minor Cambodian operations will be mounted along Route 1 in the southeast, but for the most part the current campaign will be almost totally a Saigon show.

The South Vietnamese have mixed feelings about incursions into Cambodia. Ideally, they would like to see Cambodians do all the fighting on their side of the border. Saigon recognizes, however, that the Cambodians are no match for Communist main forces and that the continued presence of large Communist units just over the border constitutes a formidable danger. While the South Vietnamese believe it is in their interest to carry out limited cross-border operations, they will keep a close watch to ensure that such operations do not leave South Vietnam itself with insufficient defenses. During the dry season last winter, this consideration prompted President Thieu to fix limits on the duration and extent of the involvement in Cambodia, and it seems likely that this concern will continue to guide South Vietnamese policy this year.

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SOUTH VIETNAM

With the onset of the fighting season in the southern part of the country, Communist forces in Military Region 3 would undoubtedly like to take advantage of the absence of South Vietnamese troops in Cambodia and mount some sort of offensive campaign in this populated and strategically important sector. General Minh, the commander, expressed considerable concern recently over his potential difficulties in defending his region while undertaking operations in Cambodia. With the withdrawal of most of the US, Australian, and Thai troops from the region, South Vietnamese forces are almost entirely responsible for the defense of the provinces around Saigon. It is clear from reports on enemy planning that the Communists hope to exploit the gaps left by the departing allies.

Communist resources within the region are limited and it is doubtful that they have enough strength to make any substantial change in the security situation. At present, there are three enemy main-force infantry regiments and an artillery regiment in MR-3. The North Vietnamese 101st Regiment, which has only some 600 men, is northwest of Saigon. This unit, which has been responsible for some of the recent harassing actions in northwestern Binh Duong Province, needs substantial reinforcement before it can create serious trouble.

The 33rd Regiment with a little over 1,200 men, the 274th Regiment with some 1,000 troops, and the North Vietnamese 74th Artillery Regiment with less than 500 men are all dispersed in remote areas to the east of Saigon. These units have been short on supplies and replacement personnel for at least a year. A significant realignment of their command structures and areas of responsibility may have lately taken place, but the changes are not likely to result in substantial improvements in food, supplies, and manpower for the units so long as the government's present security screen remains intact.

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The general situation throughout the region forces the Communists to depend in varying degrees on the local populace for financial support, concealment, and food. In some areas, this dependence is nearly total because of allied interdiction of Communist supply channels. The extended supply lines and the base areas which support them have been seriously disrupted. As a consequence, the Communists must now produce locally or procure locally their food and supplies. The resupply system must be concentrated on bringing in weapons, munitions, and medical supplies.

Recently, elements of the North Vietnamese 33rd and 274th regiments have moved south out of rugged terrain toward the areas being vacated by the Australians and Thais. The move probably is intended to break down the security previously maintained in these areas by allied forces and bring the units closer to populated areas, not only to intimidate the populace, but also to obtain food and supplies.

An enemy attempt to overrun two South Vietnamese outposts in Phuoc Tuy Province on 16 November probably represents the first test of the ability of the South Vietnamese local units to defend areas vacated by allied troops. General Minh should be able to handle the situation without serious, widespread deterioration in security by careful deployment of his mobile reserve units in support of slowly improving territorial security forces.

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Lower House Politics

The government is strengthening its position in the Lower House and appears to have a majority of the deputies firmly in its camp. The House has been slow

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to organize itself in the seven weeks since it began its fall term, but pro-government deputies--at the urging of presidential aides--are pushing through a series of internal rules designed to facilitate the executive's influence over the House. These rules should enable pro-government forces to win most, if not all, of the leadership positions and committee chairmanships in the House. Moreover, a requirement that a formal Lower House bloc must have a minimum of 40 members could hamper efforts of the diverse anti-government elements to organize an effective opposition.

Presidential aides have taken a tough line in seeking firm commitments of support from the deputies and in securing approval of a number of controversial actions. Last week the government forces secured the validation of all 159 deputies, despite extensive evidence of irregularities in the elections of several government supporters. There are indications that President Thieu will support incumbent Lower House chairman Luong for re-election when the House finally selects its officers. Luong is widely regarded as ineffective.

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The government's heavy-handed tactics and its refusal thus far to compromise could alienate some independent and moderate opposition deputies whose support may be needed in the future. In the past the government has been able to muster a two-thirds majority in the Lower House to secure passage of high-priority legislation by overriding less desirable Upper House versions. The opposition made gains in the Lower House elections last August, however, and it remains questionable whether the government's tactics will consistently deliver a two-thirds vote in the new House.

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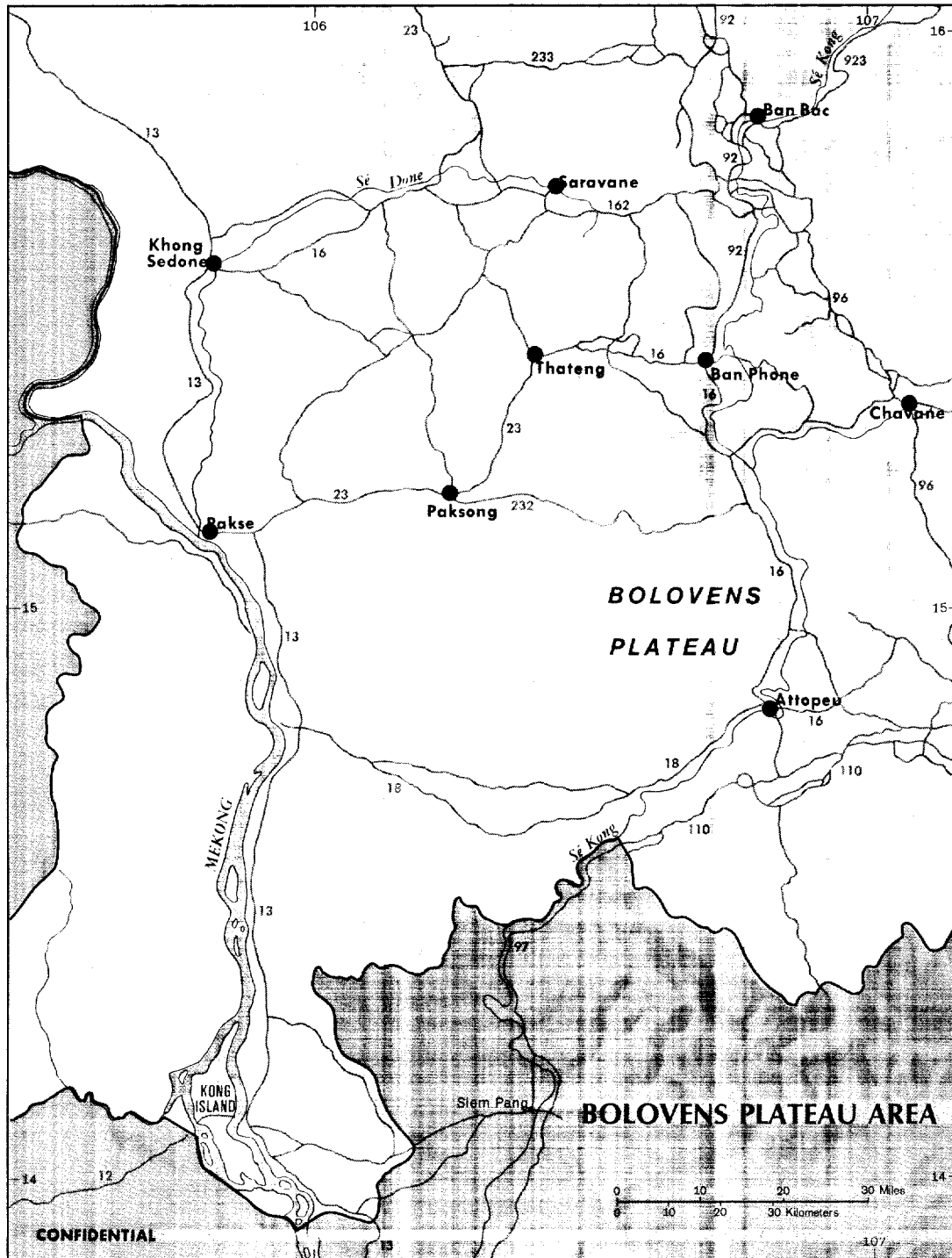
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- Government-held location
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LAOS

Government forces, attempting to disrupt Communist supply and transportation routes north of the Bolovens Plateau, encountered no significant resistance on 21 November. The irregular task force that occupied Ban Phone without a fight has established command posts around the village. Three other irregular battalions are planning to strike at transportation routes at Thateng. They have moved overland from Saravane about six miles.

The North Vietnamese are known to have six battalions between Paksong and Saravane, plus another

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